M A T W A T C H
Steve Beverly, Editor 213 Pine Hills Avenue Auburn, AL 36830
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STEVE'S SIDELIGHTS
By Steve Beverly

HELLOOOOOOO, Guys.....hopefully by next week, we'll have our new MATWATCH logo, but I hope you like the format.

Let's basically preview Sunday night's PPV show, THE GREAT AMERICAN BASH: THE PRICE FOR FREEDOM (7 Eastern/6 Central). This promises to be the best shot Crockett has ever had at a first-class pay-per-view show and he can't afford to blow it.

Crockett has everything going for him this time: (1) Ted Turner is clearing the PPV homes for the first time and has exceeded 10 million homes, a major success; (2) the $14.95 price is lower than the WWF shows, which should draw more fans; (3) no opposition from McMahon; (4) a Flair-Luger world title match that has been sold like few matches since Flair vs. 14 opponents in the '86 Bashes; (5) a locale in the NWA's top-drawing city, Baltimore, which should sell out.

I would almost venture to say this show may draw as high as a five per cent n[a]tional buy rate, which could lead to f[r]m $1.8-$2 million going to Crockett Promotions alone. TBS stands to make a similar cut.

The marketing of this show on TBS has been first-rate and by now, if your area is equipped to carry it, the print ads should be running in your paper.

Let's look at the key matches: RIC FLAIR VS. LEX LUGER. This match may give us a genuine key to whether Flair is staying with JCP. Our late information is there is to be no title change. But if Flair is going to WWF, expect that title to switch. It'll take them about four weeks to see that Luger won't draw, although Meltzer jokes that he's not sure Dusty has yet realized that Ronnie Garvin didn't draw last year. I'm going out on a limb and predicting a Luger DQ victory but no title switch, to set up a series of Flair-Luger matches in early fall.

U.S. TITLE: DUSTY RHODES VS. BARRY WINDHAM. This group almost never tips its hand to outcomes like the WWF does. But Dusty is doing Mello Yello commerc[i]ls billed as "U.S. Heavyweight Champion which probably weren't supposed to be released until after the Bash. Bet on a Dusty win and then maybe he'll decide to lay that tired ol' body down in a retirement match at STARRCADE. PLEEEZ!

TRIPLE TOWER OF DOOM: VARSITY CLUB, KEVIN SULLIVAN, AL PEREZ & ANGEL OF DEATH (RUSSIAN ASSASSIN) VS. GARVINS, ROAD WARRIORS & STEVE WILLIAMS. They have tried awfully hard for four weeks to explain this and I'm still not sure I understand it. But bet on the good guys winning here. They've got to settle the situation over Precious (Patty Wilson).

WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP: TULLY & ARN VS. STING & NIKITA KOLOFF. I have to believe some kind of DQ finish will happen here because Tully & Arn are scheduled to defend this thing all during the rest of the Bashes. Bet on Sting & Nikita being DQ'd for hitting the ref or some such nonsense.

U.S. TAG TEAM TITLE: FANTASTICS VS. MIDNIGHT EXPRESS. Cornette above the ring in a straightjacket. With folks paying $15 a pop, I have to believe they're going to see Cornette get 10 lashes with a whip at the end of this one.

A couple of other matches on the card include Larry Zbyszko vs. Brad Armstrong and the Rock & Roll Express vs. The Sheepherders, but I'm not sure if either of them will be on the live show. Rock & Roll probably will. Zybysko vs. Brad probably not.

Even with all of its talent and organizational problems, the NWA still has the cream of the crop in workers and overall performers. And with one of the greatest names in the history of the game in Flair, it still has a lead anchor. I don't think Crockett will screw this one up, though it has to be watched carefully. If Jim Ross is not used as one of the lead announcers on the telecast, it will be a major mistake. If Dusty tries to steal the show it will be a mistake. If the ending of Flair-Luger leaves fans unsatisfied, it will be a mistake. I'd prefer to see an outright victory from either of these guys, but this is where they may foul up the show the most.

But I think the Crockett group, despite all of the criticism launched its way in '88, deserves a lot of credit (thanks in large part to Ted Turner) for putting together a show that afford it a chance to break into the big money That is something few people thought would happen back in January.

COMINGS & GOINGS

First up: we really believe that the Ted Turner purchase of Jim Crockett Promotions and the NWA is imminent. Probably by August 1. Ted & Jim met face-to-face for two days two weeks ago and they are said to have reached an "agreement in principle" for a 100% buyout by Turner. The few remaining details: a final purchase price, which we're now told may be in the area of $8-8.5 million and terms and length of payment. Jim Crockett would stay for a period of at least one year as g.m. of the company, but probably leave after that. No details on whether Dusty would get the boot as booker. Ted could virtually pay for the company with his shares of about four successful PPV shows. It is a smart buy. And you can expect much more aggressive marketing of NWA performers through Ted's new licensing and merchandising company.

The 7/18 Great American Bash in Columbus, Ga., will also be taped for national TV's World Wide Wrestling. It will be the first such TV taping for Columbus.

Forget that speculation about Flair going to the WWF as Harley Race's replacement as The King. The plan is after about a 4-6 week search, Bobby Heenan will declare Haku of the Islanders as the new King and the angle will be effectively killed.

Isn't that stuff Bruce Pritchard is doing as "Brother Love" just awful? For one thing, it seems to be distracting attention away from the wrestling (not unusual for the WWF) and Bro. Love seemingly can't get off a broken record of "I love you..." Give me Ernest Angel sitting at the table on Continental talking about how nice it is to join "Sister Hyatt and Brother Platt."

It IS true that Tully Blanchard really wanted in Titan badly as The King but they apparently aren't interested in him.

I don't know if Crockett is doing this as a tryout or simply exploiting the name of former WWF and NWA star Ivan "Polish Power" Putski, but his son Scott Putski appeared on the 6/25 World Championship show and received a mild push for the Houston and Dallas Bashes. He appeared more to be emulating Jimmy Snuka and the kids in the crowd seemed to go for him, but his interview stunk.

If you call the 1-900-909-4LOU number (the 900 service fronted by Lou Albano and Bruno Sammartino), you'll get Bruno giving a daily diatribe of how Vince McMahon ripped off his son David. He told this past week of how he and David were asked to team in March '85 against Paul Orndorff and Bobby Heenan in Philadelphia and how Vince reduced David to a preliminary boy after that. Not really any new stuff, but it's interesting that they'd use this service for that.

Dave Meltzer ought to sue the 976-RING service in Atlanta. That 2-minute recorded message is virtually read verbatim from The Observer.

Note to Howard Snyder of Jacksonville: if the new Gordon Solie Florida show ever turns up on one of your channels, let me know, I'd like to arrange a video tape trade with you.

I finally saw a Japan tape of Leon White as Big Van Vader. He comes to the ring in a half suit of armor and then removes it to reveal a masked character who, predictably, is similar to Darth Vader. He tears the place up, goes after the fans, and appears to be a heel but the kids supposedly love him.

If anyone is not able to get the Bash PPV on July 10 and is interested in a dub, I'll provide them for $10---which barely takes care of the mailing and a decent quality tape. You'll pay $35 if you wait for Turner's dub.

One more story circulating on the Turner/NWA deal---if it does go through, Stan Kasten (President of the Hawks & Braves) is expected to handle all talent negotiations. The balloon-payment situation employed by Crockett would be replaced by a more orderly payment schedule. Crockett will be responsible for paying off all owed money for his 1987-88 contracts.

PROMOTER'S PROFILE
N.W.A.

Jim Crockett made a calculated decision in 1985 that changed the face of pro wrestling almost as much as Vince McMahon's national explosion with the WWF. He skyrocketed the price for Ric Flair to appear on World Class cards. Fritz Von Erich refused to ante up and World Class withdrew as an NWA affiliate. Over the following year, Crockett would break relations with Jerry Jarrett in Memphis, Mike Graham in Florida, Bill Watts with the UWF, Bob Geigel in Central States, and Ron Fuller in Continental. Don Owen continues to bill his Pacific Northwest matches as sanctioned by the NWA, but Flair hasn't appeared on an Owen card in two years.

Deciding to mount a national movement of his own to challenge McMahon, Crockett eventually swallowed up the Florida and UWF promotions and sent his own talent to Central States in an effort to bail out that failing promotion. At one point, Crockett had nearly 175 wrestlers under his employ in the spring of 1987. However, those of you who have followed the tragic shutdowns of Florida and UWF as separate promotions know the tired history of what has happened to a talent base that ---frankly---could have eaten McMahon alive in working ability.

In short, the NWA still has a highly-regarded base of performers, but if one person---namely, me---were given the task of restructuring the promotion's woes, here are the key moves I would make:

---Dump Dusty Rhodes as booker. Dusty still has promotional ability. But he can't keep pushing himself as the star of the show. The failure of THE MIDNIGHT RIDER certainly proved that.

---Develop fresh young talent and give a stronger push to the younger stars. STING ought to be the top star right now...no question. Brad Armstrong and Tim Horner have been grossly undervalued. I'd roll the dice and bid the world for hot risers such as Owen Hart, Curt Hennig, and Paul E. Dangerously.

---Make JIM ROSS the lead announcer for television. David Crockett is about as talented as Oscar Robertson used to be saying "WOWWWW" and "HEEEYYY" on NBA games in the '70s. Ross knows the holds and a lot of the history of wrestling feuds and no one generates excitement at the end of a hot match like Jim.

---Kill THE FOUR HORSEMEN and turn RIC FLAIR babyface. It's long overdue and would draw heat all over the country against his ex-partners.

---Re-establish working relationships with other promotions. This will probably take a new owner (do you hear me, Ted?) but "big" cards such as the CROCKETT CUP and even STARRCADE need fresh faces to decidedly market a major-league flavor. Crockett had a chance to get both World Class and Stampede stars for the CROCKETT CUP and failed.

---Dump the BUNKHOUSE STAMPEDE as a "supercard." Do you know of anyone who really cares about this one?

That's just a half-dozen thoughts. Personally, I think the best think which could happen to the NWA would be the proposed purchase by Ted Turner. Ted is a broadcast professional, he recognizes pro wrestling as the staple that first drew an audience for the old WTCG in Atlanta and nationally for his Super Station. Plus, he sees the home video and pay-per-view gold mine.

If there has been a serious criticism of Crockett's efforts nationally, it is that his front office is largely one of old wrestling cronies (Johnny Weaver, Sandy Scott, Dusty, etc.) while McMahon has hired young, hungry media marketing specialists. Turner has many of these pros on his staff and there is no love lost between Ted and Vince from the time Vince briefly took over the World Championship slot on the SuperStation in 1984-85. Vince has had five glorious years, but Ted Turner is perhaps the shrewdest communications professional in America. I'd certainly love to see a war between those two and guess who I'd bet on to win.

I REMEMBER.... Mario Galento

I first met Mario in 1968. He had been a barnstormer of 30 years, predominantly as a villain. His exploits were legendary. Mario left many territories in abrupt dispute with promoters, had toured with a created "brother," Al (Spider) Galento, and amplified an image which had led to his arrest in the 1950s on the streets of New York.

But I remember the softer side of Mario. His first wife, Lucille, had written a biography of her husband, THE GENTLE BRUTE, which Mario peddled at every arena show. When I read it, I was reminded of the song, "A Boy Named Sue." Mario was born Bonny Lee Boyette and any male with a name like Bonny had to be a street fighter.

In the 1950s, Mario had posted wins over Bruno Sammartino, Buddy Rogers, and Wilbur Snyder---all of whom posted claim to the NWA and WWF world titles. But he had turned babyface in the mid-60s, shortly after losing a boxing match to Buddy Fuller during which Fuller's second, ex-heavyweight champ, Rocky Marciano, knocked out Galento during a referee bump.

But after his turn, Mario demonstrated a great love for children. He would show up at a small-town arena two hours before the matches just to entertain the kids. Once in Waycross, Ga., Galento regaled us with stories of his early career and demonstrated the sleeper and his infamous hangman on my friend, Phil Grant. I also remember how many of the wrestlers would get us kids to sell pictures for them and send us home with a non-glossy 8x10. Mario paid us cash...15 percent of everything we sold. We didn't forget him for that.

Mario is one of the few old-timers who could have made it in today's spectrum. His feuds against Butcher Vachon and Infernos manager J.C. Dykes were as colorful as Dizzy Dean pitching for the St. Louis Cardinals.

I don't know where Mario is today, dead or alive. About 15 years ago, Dykes told me Galento had suffered a mental breakdown (probably from chasing J.C. across the country). Not even former commentator Ed Capral can tell me his whereabouts. But in today's high-gloss, programmed world of wrestling, boy, do we need Mario now.

TV TEMPO

Reviewing key happenings of shows for the weekend of July 2-3:

(NWA) - On NWA PRO, Nikita Koloff did a run-in on Al Perez with the sickle and drew a mild amount of heat; On TBS Saturday, The Rock & Roll Express returned and were pushed as trying for a 5th world title reign; on NWA MAIN EVENT, Sting & Steve Williams went to a heated 20-minute draw with the Midnight Express while Barry Windham was DQ'd against Nikita after the typical 4-on-1 Horsemen run-in.

(WWF) - The Rougeaus beat the Killer Zzzzs with their new rulebreaking style but drew more cheers than they ever have. Other than that, the highlight was Jesse Ventura minus headscarf and earring.

(CWF) - Tony Anthony and Dr. Tom Prichard engaged in a wild brawl that ended in the White Boy's DQ when Mystic interfered, but Bambi (a former POWW girl and ex-Memphis manager of The Hunter) showed up to make the save for Prichard. Look for some future catfights.

(SOUTHERN) - Mr. Wrestling II met Buck Robley in a bad match that had Dick Slater interfere before a minute elapsed. Chris Adams then came out to make the [illegible]e but Robley is perfectly awful and it's sad to see II reduced to this.

(AWA) - Robert Gibson and Groovy Greg Gagne won by DQ over Pat Tanaka and Paul Diamond in an AWA tag title match that showed Gibson and Gagne had never teamed. This match was taped three weeks ago and points up the lack of immediacy in most TV wrestling today. Robert & Ricky are already back with Crockett and yet, Robert was seen here demanding an AWA rematch.

(WORLD CLASS) - Headlined by a good Jerry Lawler-Terry Taylor match for the AWA title. Lawler won by DQ but Kerry Von Erich showed up to issue a title vs. title challenge.

(USA) - Wendell Cooley and Buddy Landell had a short brawl which started by Cooley tossing Terry Adonis out of the ring when Adonis would not allow Cooley to "buy out his contract" to meet Landell.

(PORTLAND) - Jimmy Jack Funk (Jesse Barr) returned and won by DQ over Al Madril. The Assassin (Dave Sierra) left for Japan.

BLOOPER AWARD OF THE WEEK---Gary Ha for saying Kevin Von Erich (instead of Kevin Sullivan) had invented the Triple Tower of Doom.

Till next week....show us your SPUTNIK MONROE profiles!!!

Steve